



Newsfront

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Pakistan Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Oct. - Nov., 1970), p. 10

Published by: [Middle East Research and Information Project \(MERIP\)](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2568967>

Accessed: 11/07/2012 21:08

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NEWSFRONT

NOTE: In the NEWSFRONT we wish to bring to our readers news about some interesting and important events taking place in Pakistan which are not usually reported in the official sources of information for Pakistanis in North America. Some of this news may become outdated before the reader gets his copy, but with the present limited resources of the Forum and its infrequent publication, we can only make a modest beginning – Editors.

PEASANTS ORGANIZE

The peasants of Pakistan, the most down-trodden segment of the society, have begun to organize themselves and demand their rights. A number of peasant conferences were held in the recent past in the different parts of the country. The latest in the series was organized by Student-Labor-Peasant Co-ordinating Committee on June 22 and 23 in Sakrand, Sind. The untimely death of the leader of the Hari Haqdar Party, Mr. Haider Bux Jatoi, deprived the delegates of having a chance to listen to the founder of peasant movement in Sind. The conference was presided over by Sheikh Abdul Majid Sindhi and attended by 25 thousand peasants, 95% of whom were landless tillers. About 70% of Sind's peasants are landless and more are being evicted from land by the "Green Revolution." Former MNA, Mr. Ghaus Bux Bizenjo, and NAP leader Mahmood-ul-Huq Usmani were among the speakers at the conference.

The Sakrand conference was organized in the wake of the success of several earlier conferences of peasants held in East Pakistan and Punjab. Krishik Samiti and the various factions of Bhashani NAP arranged the conferences at Mahipur and Santosh which were attended by several hundred thousand red-capped peasants, workers, and students and addressed, among others, by Maulana Bhashani.

The Punjabi peasant is not accustomed to wearing caps, but close to 40,000 of them wore red turbans and marched from every district of the province to Toba Tek Singh to participate in Punjab's first mass peasant rally on the Pakistan Day. Maulana Bhashani enchanted his peasant followers with his recipe of *Hukumat-e-Rabbani*, tradition of Hazrat Abuzar Ghafari, and modern socialism, and called for a total control of workers and peasants over the means of production. Peasant representatives from all parts of the country attended this conference which was organized by the Kisan wing of Bhashani NAP and the Peoples Party. Leader of the West Pakistan railway workers, Mirza Ibrahim, addressed the rally and stressed the need for worker-peasant solidarity. Former MNA from Rangpur, Masihur Rahman, made a passionate speech against social injustices and was arrested and sentenced to seven years of hard labor. He was released later on. A large number of poets and artists also converged on Toba Tek Singh. Among them was Faiz Ahmed Faiz who recited parts of his long poem to the peasants. Maulana Ehtishamul Huq denounced this conference as "un-Islamic"; public

sentiment forced him to retract his statement. Panic-stricken feudal politicians rushed to Toba Tek Singh to "neutralize" the effect of the conference; even a world Sunni conference was staged in that desolate place.

Peasant delegates at these conferences demanded the return of land to the tillers, abolition of taxes on the small holdings, and representation in the legislatures on the basis of class strength. The landlords and parties loyal to them did their utmost to sabotage these conferences.

BOOKS BANNED

Book after book is being banned by Pakistan's military rulers. A large number of works by East Pakistani scholars recently fell victim to the wrath of the brass; included in this list are Kamaruddin Ahmed's *Social History of East Pakistan*, and Badruddin Umer's *Cultural Communalism and Cultural Crisis*. Prof. Fazlur Rahman's *Islam* and Gunnar Myrdal's *Asian Drama* are among the other books denied to the reading public in Pakistan.

CHAMELEONS

A healthy aspect of the current election campaign in Pakistan is the discussion of some issues and presentation of ideological alternatives by some parties. But the politics of personality and property doesn't seem to spare the two ideological and populist parties of West Pakistan. A Number of feudalists and former Generals have begun to jump on the bandwagons of People's Party and Jamat-e-Islami – apparently without subscribing to their program and discipline. While Mushtaq Ahmed Gurmani and former Major General Umrao Khan have joined the Jamat, feudalist Pir, Makhdoom of Hala, has thrown his lot with PPP. Former Chief of Pakistan Army, General Akbar Khan's association with PPP, however, is not surprising since General Akbar has always been a staunch nationalist and anti-imperialist. So far as the other top military men in the politics are concerned, Air Marshal Asghar Khan, after making several somersaults, has settled down as the "leader" of Istiqlal movement, while shrewd Air Marshal Nur Khan seems to be betting on a winning horse: Daultana's CML.

NEWSPAPERS GALORE

The proliferation of political parties in Pakistan has been accompanied by a multiplication of newspapers. An English language daily Sun has appeared in Karachi, which is alleged to be the mouthpiece of CML. The Jamat-e-Islami has brought out an Urdu daily, Jasarat, from Lahore and a Bengali one, Sangram, from Dacca. The People's Party has come out with its Lahore daily, Mussawat. Meanwhile Dacca got its evening paper the daily Evening Post, which is said to have the support of Awami League. The original editors of Lail-o-Nihar, Syed Sibte Hassan and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, have got together to resurrect their once respectable newsweekly from Karachi.

STUDENT ELECTIONS

Some interesting regional trends were witnessed in the student body elections in Pakistan, which may very well indicate the direction in which the wind is blowing in Pakistan politics.

In the two major universities and many colleges in West Pakistan, the right wing Islami Jamiat-e-Tulaba (Jamat-e-Islami) scored significant victories. In Karachi University elections, Jamat's victory was ensured by a left wing rivalry between NSF-Kazmi group (NAP-Wali Khan) and NSF-Rashid group (NAP-Bhashani). Out of more than 2000 votes cast, the Jamat candidate secured 900 and the rest were split among the NSF candidates and two independents. In the University of the Panjab, veteran student leader of Jamat, Hafiz Idrees, defeated an independent Jehangir Badar by 96 votes in a contest where 4350 votes were cast and certain irregularities were admitted by the university administration. The student elections in Sind, Baluchistan, and N.W.F.P. reinforced the stronghold of NSF and NAP in these provinces.

Meanwhile the East Pakistan student politics took a significant turn and came close to the realities of East Pakistan's current politics. The long held hegemony of the East Pakistan Students' Union (EPSU) was ended by a thumping victory of Awami League's student arm, East Pakistan Students' League (EPSL). Infighting between the various factions of EPSU and later on a boycott of elections by Menon group (Bhashani NAP) made the things easier for EPSL. In the Dacca University Central Students' Union, EPSL secured all the seats except that of Social Secretary which was won by EPSU-Motia group (Wali NAP). The EPSL margin over EPSU was of a general magnitude of 10% in popular votes. The Jamat-e-Islami's Islamic Chhatro Sangha received about 10% of the vote cast, in spite of a well financed and vigorous campaign. The remaining student bodies were completely routed. The EPSL also made a clean sweep of all posts in all halls except Mohsin Hall where an EPSU candidate won the post of General Secretary. The voting behaviour in Dacca University elections showed a clear preference of 80-90% of the students for autonomy, social justice, and progressive politics.

ECO STEP

Pakistan recently became the first country in the world to ban the export of skins of wild animals. This step was taken on the recommendation of World Wildlife Fund committee, headed by conservationist Guy Mountfort. Bengal tigers, leopards, Sind wild ass, rhinoceros, several species of wild goats and birds are threatened with extinction. The Government is implementing other measures to check poaching and conserve wildlife.